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ABSTRACT

The seven articles in this journal issue deal with the politics and practice of teaching writing. The articles focus on the following topics: (1) efforts to establish educational accountability, including competency based teacher education, licensing of teachers, and minimum competency testing; (2) methods for teaching students to use intuition in the composing process; (3) the use of forensic rhetoric (legal writing) as the basis of an argumentative prose course; (4) basic skills in English and the training of English teachers; (5) a free writing lesson in a first grade classroom; (6) cohesion in writing; and (7) a college course in autobiographical writing. (GT)

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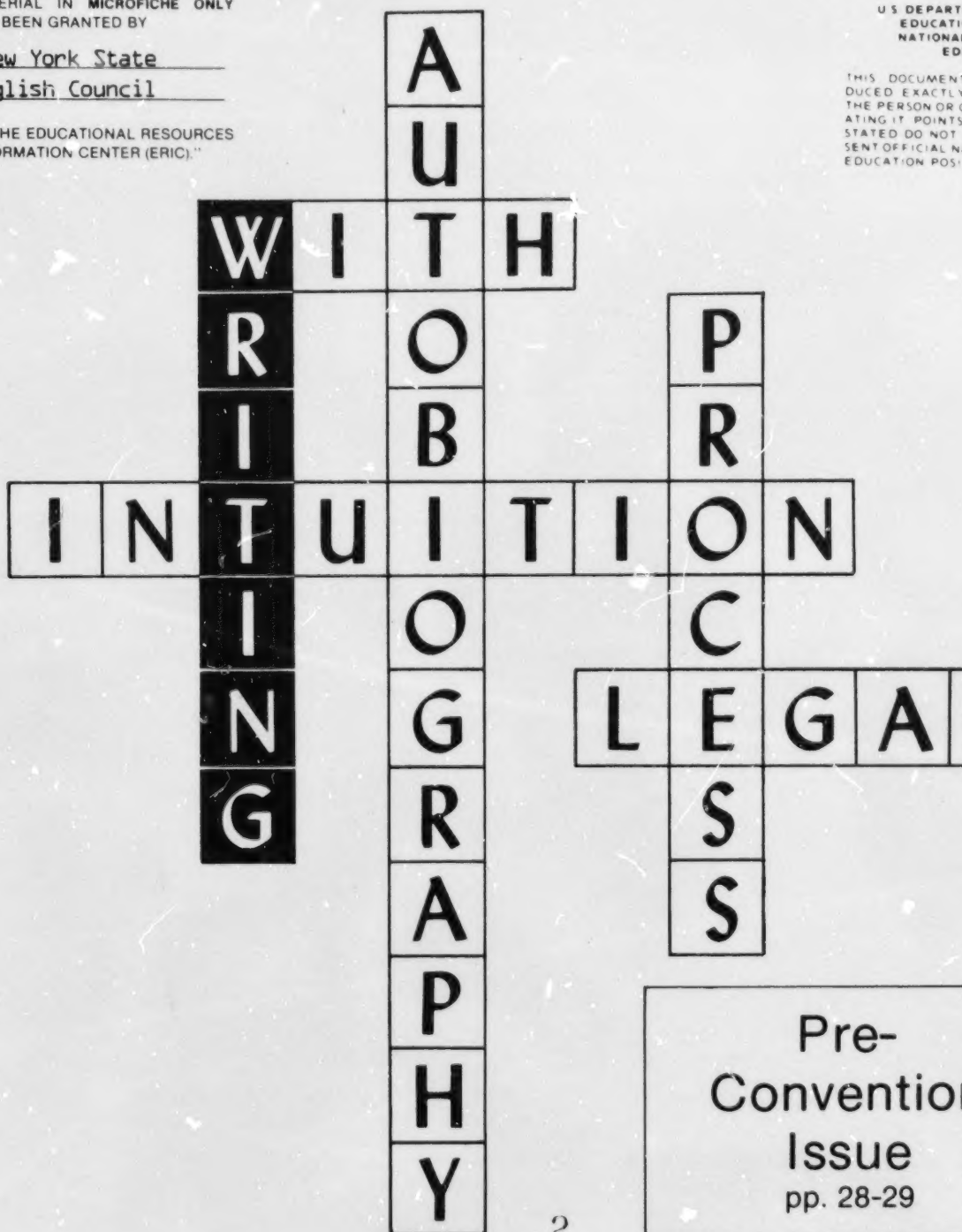
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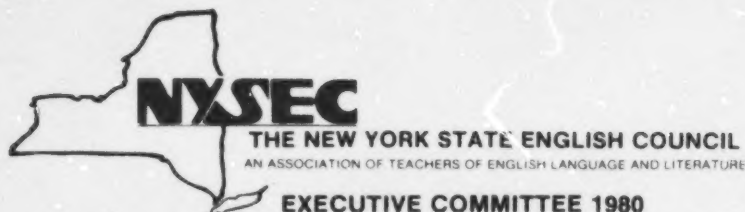
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EDITORS, ENGLISH RECORD: Maxine M. Long and William J. McCleary, Genesee Community College, Batavia 14020

EDITOR, MONOGRAPHS: Judy I. Schwartz, Elementary and Early Childhood, Queens College, Flushing 11367

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For the Record

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MANUSCRIPTS on all aspects of English are invited. Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, and should include documentation within the text whenever possible. Manuscripts will be returned only if accompanied by an addressed envelope with sufficient postage enclosed.

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THE NEXT ISSUE of *The English Record*, the Fall 1980 issue, will appear in December. It will be devoted mainly to examples of student writing.

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MANUSCRIPTS will ordinarily be screened, and the authors notified, within six weeks.

From the Editors

*Reading maketh a full man,
Conference a ready man
And writing an exact man.*

As seasoned teachers of composition, we thought how easy it would be to organize this issue around the theme of teaching writing. We had received a variety of articles, combining both theoretical and practical knowledge, which suggested how we English teachers might improve our own styles and strategies in the classroom. And by improving our strategies, we might, indeed, make our students "more exact."

The articles ranged from showing the successful use of free writing with first graders and college students, to incorporating autobiographical essays in both beginning and advanced composition courses, to explaining how legal models can successfully replace traditional prose forms in a freshman rhetoric course.

But we soon realized that we had become momentary victims of our naiveté. We had forgotten that in these times, we cannot discuss writing without also discussing politics; for such matters as accountability, competency testing, and the licensing of teachers have brought politics into the teaching of writing. For this reason we have included two articles which address these problems. The authors not only challenge us to become more active and less passive, but offer suggestions as to how we may do so.

There are two new features in this issue which we hope may become regular items. One is the "Serendipity" and the other is the use of illustrations.

We envision the "Serendipity" column as a place where teachers can share experiences which don't lend themselves to full-fledged journal

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articles, but which their colleagues would still enjoy.

Our thanks to Matt Deutscher, head of the Art Department of East High School in Rochester, for the illustrations in this issue. Mr. Deutscher holds an MFA from Rochester Institute

of Technology and has exhibited in numerous local galleries, including the Rochester Memorial Art Gallery.

The artwork is greatly appreciated, for the editors are severely lacking in artistic talent. Jo Kehoe, NYSEC past president, made this contact for us.

Accountability, or, *Barefoot in the Stubble*

WITH THE MARVELOUS ingenuousness said to be characteristic of youth, a student of mine once wrote, "I have come to college to learn where I am at." I remember wondering uncomfortably whether I could say with certainty where I am and whether we English teachers have a realistic understanding of where we are in the present scheme of things. Without expecting to settle the matter, I should like to explain where I think we are and how we got there and what we need to do in case we do not like wherever we find ourselves.

We are not on a merry-go-round because *merry* is surely an inappropriate word to describe our current situation, and we are not on a Ferris wheel even though we do have high and lows as we go in circles. Where we are, I think, is barefoot in the stubble. Tenderfooted, we pick our way hesitantly and painfully. We are not in the stubble of our own free will, and after treading a zigzag path, we will probably emerge at a place we could not have foretold. The stubble we are in today is called accountability. It takes several forms. I shall comment briefly about competency-based teacher education (CBTE), licensing, and achievement testing; and I shall finish with a statement about what I think we should learn from the "accountability experience."

CBTE has attracted a great deal of interest in state education departments and in the United States Office of Education (USOE), but it has generated at best a mixed reaction among teachers. CBTE deals with the way teachers are trained and certified, and thus, also deals with the mechanism by which teachers enter, or are excluded from, the profession. CBTE is accountability applied to teacher preparation. Particular provisions vary from state to state, but in general the programs must list the specific competencies to be taught, and students are required to demonstrate their mastery of the competencies as they proceed. The programs utilize performance objectives which are supposed to be accurately measurable. It is common for CBTE programs to be designed cooperatively

by a public school system and a college.

In New York State, one of the early CBTE proposals discussed in the State Education Department would have wiped out "input" in the form of course work and degrees for teachers and would have substituted a practical teaching test. Certification would have been for five-year periods, and recertifications would have depended upon a measurement of the success of the teachers' work. This plan, apparently, assumed that a precise quantitative measure could be developed fairly soon and that if the student had not learned then the teacher had not taught. This plan was not implemented. Nor was it ever officially made public. News of it leaked out and stimulated some opposition. Subsequent plans that were made public retreated from the more extreme positions. However, it is important to know that this plan was seriously proposed because it indicates how easily accountability-for-teaching-improvement merges with accountability-as-punishment. At the present time, CBTE in New York State is mandated and involves cooperative programs between colleges and school systems. A feature of all these cooperative programs is that they list in great detail the skills, knowledge and attitudes that the future teacher is supposed to acquire. Whether the enumeration of competencies, the cooperative planning, and the intended accommodation of students' individual needs will provide better teachers — remains to be seen.

In 1975, the then Commissioner of Education in New York, Ewald Nyquist, appointed a Task Force on Teachers Education and Certification. Its purpose was to examine alternatives to mandated CBTE programs. In 1977, the Commissioner's Task Force proposed that teaching be legally defined as a profession and that a Professional Board be established. The responsibility to govern the profession would be transferred from the State Education Department to the representatives of the profession on the Board. The Task Force also recommended that teachers be permanently licensed after completing an approved baccalaureate program, passing a licensing examination in the candidate's content area, completing a one-year internship, and completing a master's degree in an area functionally related to the area of teaching. These proposals were essentially what professional groups had been urging for approximately twenty-five years.

J. Stephen Sherwin is Distinguished Service Professor of English, SUC Buffalo. He was for many years chairman of the NYSEC Committee on Teacher Preparation and Certification.



After receiving the Report of the Task Force, the Board of Regents initiated a further study of licensing and teaching as a profession. Commissioner Gordon Ambach, who succeeded Nyquist in 1977, was supportive of the Task Force recommendations but was instructed to prepare proposals that would incorporate changes desired by the Board of Regents. The result was a document dated March,

1980, and entitled *Teaching as a Profession and Teacher Competence: A Tentative Proposal of the Board of Regents on Teaching as a Profession and Teacher Competence*. Public hearings were scheduled for April, and at this writing the results of the hearings have not been revealed.

The Regents Tentative Proposal has been criticized in several respects. First, it requires "performance review" far beyond what is required of other professions. Each teacher is required to "develop annual performance objectives . . . related to pupil performance and program evaluation results" (p. 52). Also, supervisors are required to observe the performance of all tenured classroom teachers three times a year and observe all nontenured teachers five times a year. Second, professional discipline goes beyond what is required to protect the public from incompetence and perpetrators of well-defined criminal acts to include any

conduct which may in the future be deemed "unprofessional" by the Board of Regents. Not only does the Board of Regents contemplate determining unprofessional conduct but it also proposes itself as the body to take final action on any complaint against a teacher. Proposed penalties range from reprimand to revocation of license and a fine not to exceed five thousand dollars. Third, the provision establishing permanent licensure is undermined by another provision for local performance review which can result in "disciplinary or dismissal procedures" (p. 51). It is clear that the permanency of a state-granted license thus depends upon how well a locality likes the way a person teaches. A permanent license would seem to be permanent only until the next, annual review. And how will teachers be reviewed? Apparently they will be judged according to the performance objectives they were required to write. In other words, if the student has not learned, then the teacher has not taught.

Accountability in the form of minimum competency testing for students started out with a bang in 1975 and 1976 in Florida, California, and Oregon. Its advocates were not teachers but members of state education departments and members of community groups who saw competency testing as a means of making education more efficient and economical. By 1978, 33 states (including New York) had taken some action to implement minimum competency testing for students. Then the movement switched into low gear, although it did not stop. Growing awareness of the complexities of the problem inspired caution, as did the cost of remediation for those who failed the test and the threat of lawsuits by those who consider such tests culturally biased. No caution is evident in New York State, however. In 1979 the Board of Regents introduced a more difficult version of an earlier test, and the Board tentatively plans to revoke a school's registration if 85% of the senior class cannot pass the test. What began as minimum competency testing of students has become a trend toward competency testing of teachers. According to a survey completed in May, 1979, and reported in the *Kappan* (January, 1980, p. 359), ten states mandate teacher competency testing and seven are considering such a test.

Advocates of competency testing for students say that it guarantees that a diploma will have meaning, that it motivates students to work harder, and that it defines society's expectations and thus makes the school's job easier. They reject the idea that minimum requirements will become maximum and thus actually lower expected achievement levels, and they argue (as does the Educational Testing Service in a free pamphlet available from its Information Division) that a "baseline . . . is preferable to the status quo — an acceptable quality of education."

Critics of competency testing for students insist that failing students on yet another test will not teach them anything except that they are indeed failures, that public

schools do not have the money to provide a separate course of study for the estimated 20% of the school population who would probably need remediation in one or more subjects, and that disadvantaged and minority students will self-select by their higher rate of failure on inescapably culturally biased examinations and thus will be segregated in remedial programs outside the educational mainstream.

Accountability is an attractive idea, and seductive, too. It deserves inspection. I think we should start by asking to whom we are accountable and how the standard of accountability was decided upon. How broadly based is the standard and how widely supported? Or is it the idea of a few people who are in a position to impose it and are themselves largely unaccountable? I should like to know how good the instruments are which purport to measure competency. This matter of measures is the shakiest pillar in the whole accountability edifice. The framers of the CBTE program in the Education Department in New York originally anticipated that precise instruments would be developed which would enable teaching performance to be measured by student performance. But since the Department recognized that such precise and subtle measures were not yet in existence, it simply said that it intended to utilize such measures as soon as they were devised. So far as I know, the Department has never officially and publically altered this position. The intention to measure teaching in terms of student performance still hangs overhead, Damocles-like. If the student has not learned, the teacher has not taught. Surely this is one of the most simplistic ideas to afflict educational thinking in modern times.

My response to the several forms of accountability includes a large admixture of doubt and distrust — doubt in the efficacy of the plans and distrust of many of the people in leadership roles in government and elsewhere who have pushed too hard, too soon, too uncritically for its implementation. I have nothing but sympathy and praise for the people on the front lines in the public schools and colleges who have tried to eliminate the most onerous features and create programs that will work. But critical as I am, I must add that I see some possibly positive outcomes.

The accountability movement has certainly reminded us of the biblical truth that the "tree is known by his fruit"; the push for accountability has encouraged us to look at our results and to improve them whenever we have the means to do so. Of course, sometimes we have the means and sometimes not. Again to speak positively, I think that the accountability movement has helped us to work out our priorities and to organize instruction a bit more efficiently and to identify skills, attitudes, and knowledge that both we and society believe are important to impart. Teacher preparation programs in the past (for example) have erred somewhat in emphasizing abstractions, theories, and attitudinal matters at the expense of practical skills. It is not enough for teachers to know the history of the English

language and not enough for teachers to know that they should like children. The liking must be translated into appropriate behavior and the teachers must also be able to do a variety of other things, such as choose suitable recordings to be played at suitable times for well-defined purposes without scratching the disc. I am not downgrading theoretical or abstract matters. I am saying only that a certain bias in the past needed correction. I hope that the accountability movement will not provide an overcorrection.

However, when I look at the accountability movement as a sociohistorical event, I find several things which trouble me. I am troubled by further evidence of our predilection for panaceas. We must learn that the way to achieve progress is not to give up the ship (as then Assistant Commissioner Alvin Lierheimer advised us to do back in 1969) but, instead, to make judicious plans for change that are given genuine trials before they are widely adopted. Nothing like this happened in New York when CBTE was quietly being readied by the Education Department as the solution to the alleged ills of teacher preparation.

I am troubled, also, by the factory model that seems to be in the minds of the advocates of accountability. The use of such terms as *product*, *school management*, *plant*, *output*, and *efficiency* betray an analogy between industry and education that may well be another epic misconception to afflict education in our time.

John Goodlad's massive study of schooling in America also deplores the factory model for education. He studied 39 selected schools across the country using techniques much like those of an anthropologist. Goodlad regards schools as complex cultures that we need to understand better before we try to change them. It certainly is strange that we should be contending with a factory model for education when industry itself has been having second thoughts about its own functioning. It almost seems that things that fizzle elsewhere are tried out on education. I wonder if driver education classes are going to be offered leftover incendiary Pintos and Firestone radials. If so, maybe we can decline the offer.

I say *maybe* we can decline the offer because we have not had much to say about the conduct of our professional lives. This troubles me as much — or more — than anything I have mentioned. We have more organizations and less organization than any other profession. Only recently has the situation begun to change as the NEA and AFT compete to show how helpful they can be. I should prefer that they combine their strength and find some middle ground on which all, or most, of us can stand. But at least we in New York can thank our lobbyists that things are not worse.

I see no way to apply cosmetics to one ugly truth. We have been more acted upon than acting. The one hope is that the solution is in our hands. We have not yet seized the opportunity, but we could and should. Our history is not encouraging, but the past is not inevitably replicated in the

future. As for the present, we are still squandering our strength in fraternal squabbles. When a member of the Board of Regents advocated competency tests for teachers, a NYSUT vice president agreed on the grounds that it is only fair to mandate tests for teachers when tests are already required of students. The president of NEA's New York Educators Association disagreed and suggested facetiously that we need a minimum competency test for the members of the Board of Regents. The disagreement, though important, is less important than the schism it betrays even among the members of the organized profession. Until we have greater cohesiveness, we will allow crucial decisions to be made by others.

CBTE, licensing, and competency testing are simply three examples among others of educational policies which affect the way teachers go about their business. What happened with CBTE was dreadful. The program and the decision to implement it were decided upon by people in the State Education Department without professional or community involvement in the form of task forces, committees, commissions, or public hearings. Substantive involvement by legitimately interested parties was wholly absent, and there was no attempt to provide even the semblance of window dressing. Unfortunately, the response from the profession was cautious and meek, but NYSEC, to its credit, did protest. The covert decision to implement CBTE must be recorded as a prime example of bureaucratic imperiousness which should be offensive not only to teachers but to all citizens. Some of the shame and the blame must be shared by teachers and their organizations because they allowed it to happen so easily.

As for competency testing, the profession is still speaking with a divided voice. The situation with respect to licensing is a bit more promising. Thomas Hobart, president of NYSUT, has been forthright in his condemnation of the Regents Tentative Proposal, calling it, among other things, a declaration of war on the teachers of the state, and NYSUT is apparently lining up political support to prevent enactment of totally unacceptable provisions. We are still merely reacting, but at least the reaction is forceful.

In *The Freedom of the Will*, back in 1754, Jonathan Edwards said, "I assert that nothing ever comes to pass without a cause," and I agree. Since our troublesome fate has a cause, I turn to Emerson who said, "Fate is unpenetrated causes," and I readily agree that we must discover the reason for our being sorely beset. The reason is not, I think, a wrongheaded Board of Regents or a wave of public conservatism. The reason, more likely, is that teachers have long been a convenient object of blame for a host of social problems. That is the role we must stop playing. Pogo was right. The enemy is us, our own passivity and lack of shared purpose. The remedy comes in two parts. *Action*. "The great end of life," said Huxley, "is . . . action." And *unity*. "We must," said Franklin, "all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately." ■

Using Intuition in the Composing Process

ALTHOUGH WE HAVE matured substantially in our theoretical grasp of composing in the past decade, the traditional paradigm seems to linger on. Theorists keep us current on the latest in invention theory and the most promising research in composing, yet our texts and our classroom techniques can't shake the old habits. Finished writing still dominates composition pedagogy.

If theorists insist that writing is a living process, a way of acting and knowing, a mental activity, then our texts oversimplify it by almost exclusively emphasizing the logical, the coherent and sequential. If writing is part intuitive, part analytical, blending the innate and the learned, why do so many of our classroom strategies ignore verbal intuition by stressing form and syntax rather than the dynamics of this process? Even though studies have shown that good writers productively spend a large percent of their time on prewriting activities, most texts — even our most informed — are still tied to the end product, neglecting Janet Emig's insight that learning to write needs to be a process we can help initiate through imagination and sustain through empathy and support (Emig, 1971, 97).

It's not that our rhetorical information is so outdated or pointless. On the contrary, since writing is partly a skill and a craft, much of it can be directly useful. But what is rarely made clear is *when* all these rhetorical

strategies are useful. For students, writing texts create the inhibiting illusion that competent writers need to be informed about rhetorical and linguistic principles before they start to write, that they begin with systematic strategies in mind, and that they know exactly what they want to say. But surely no one believes that in the early stages of composing writers consciously subordinate sentences in certain patterns. And few of us really imagine that writers sit down to do comparison or contrast or Rogerian persuasion. After reading our texts, however, many students sense that the placement of controlling sentences needs to be pondered, a mode of discourse needs to be chosen, a method of paragraph development needs to be planned, and an outline has to be constructed before one can begin to write. There seems to be no place in this schema for something as seemingly random and incidental as intuition, something as obvious as starting to write.

As classroom teachers, we need to put our texts into perspective. Are all those hundreds of pages the result of an empirical survey of actual writing? Are the techniques and strategies prescriptive or descriptive? It's never made clear — at least not to students. Yet studies show that there is nothing particularly accurate about all this information anyway, making a good deal of it highly questionable, and much of it an over-regularized idealization of choices that writers make intuitively, as a response to content, not adherence to form (e.g., Braddock, 1974).

To make matters worse, there is little

sense of how this textbook information fits into a composing sequence. Students should know that most composition theory is an approximation of how successful writers solved problems of composing we all share. How useful is it, then, to give students prefabricated solutions to basic problems? If writers don't get practice solving difficult composing problems, how effectively are we preparing them for writing beyond our course? If we designate aim, mode, length, subject, audience and more, aren't the basic problems already solved?

Why can't we start teaching the composing sequence from scratch, from those first half-understood ideas, opinions, and memories? These earliest stages seem the most crucial because here personal commitment, the impetus for enduring the rigors of producing edited public prose, begins. And it is here that our innate verbal resources are so valuable. For unexperienced writers, these early stages can be the most interesting and the most productive.

Mina Shaughnessy notes that the writing course should be the "place where the writer not only writes but experiences in a conscious orderly way the stages of the composing process itself" (Shaughnessy, 1977, 81). I read this as a call for a teaching sequence in which we guide students through a process that begins with the discovery and clarification of a subject and ends with copy-editing and proofreading. We can provide a flexible framework, where each writer's individual composing process can find room to develop.

John Clifford is a member of the Department of English, University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

If we break this naturally continuous yet recursive process into discreet stages for teaching purposes, we can then introduce timely rhetorical information at the appropriate stage. Choices about mode, development, syntax and coherence can then be made with a keener sense of purpose since this information can then help solve immediate problems. And as our assignments grow more demanding, we can continue to give students relevant information, in direct response to an authentic task, not in the isolation of a lesson on paragraph structure or transitions.

Our intuition can structure and inform all the major stages of composing, helping to discover and clarify attitudes, shaping paragraphs and sentences. Even in proofreading our intuitive sense of pace and length can help us cut and reorder. To explore the implications of such a sequence, I

first asked my class to read Loren Eiseley's "Dance of the Frogs": a provocative essay about a haunting conversation Eiseley has with a fellow scientist who one spring night in an isolated marsh joins hundreds of frogs in a hypnotic rush to a mating pond (Eiseley, 1978). The scientist, now a recluse, tells us that his hand became webbed just before he regained his rationality at the end of a dock. If he had continued, we assume, the metamorphosis would have been completed.

My students' first reaction to the piece was to ask if this really happened. Many did not know. After several minutes of cautious discussion, many were still unsure. I was interested in the impact that writing might have on their attitudes so I passed out a series of focused free-

writing assignments. The first asked, What happened and why? The second: Do you believe such things can happen? The third: What are some possible explanations? We then sat in small groups and read sections of our papers to each other.

For the next class, they wrote three more focused free-writings: What are the advantages and disadvantages of believing in events such as these? What are some of the things you accept on faith? And finally: If this is fiction, what are we to think about Eiseley's intentions? In discussing their responses, we read to each other, discussing many things, from the Bible and Bigfoot, to induced illness and illusionists. We shared our speculations, fears and beliefs about the unknown, the supernatural and the unexplainable. After these discussions



and writings, I asked the class to rapidly write a beginning paragraph three different ways. We talked about where these possible leads seemed to be going. Most thought they wanted to express an opinion, some wanted to analyze, and few wanted to convince.

After following one of their introductions, students wrote a full draft to read to their group. After listening, each member wrote responses to two questions: What is the writer trying to do, and with what do you agree and disagree?

The writer then prepared a good draft with three copies, using students' responses to the draft as feedback. In this stage, these writers now began to focus on organization, carefully describing for each other how they thought the essay's parts fit together. It was during this stage that I found structural theories to be directly useful. Adapting paragraph ideas from Becker, D'Angelo and Rogers helped give them a frame of reference for sharpening patterns already intuitively generated. On the sentence level, Winterowd's grammar of coherence, Christensen's levels of generality and Schor and Fishman's ideas on modification were also directly useful since they joined an intuitive structure already started.

After they reordered and edited these working drafts, I duplicated two student papers for selected exercises on style and proofreading, starting first from what "sounded right," what clicked in the ear.

I divided the composing process for this assignment into nine stages, with more than half the time devoted to invention. Initially I did not mention rhetorical principles because I think the first stages of invention need to be spontaneous and risk-taking. The chance for committed prose increases if students believe you are more interested in *what* they write not *how* they write. This is the stage for seeing what you say, for creating as you write, for expressive trial and error, and for exploratory fluency.

When parameters are too finely set, our better students spend much

needed exploratory time trying to get the three point topic sentence in the right place. And our less experienced writers are so intimidated by rhetorical constraints that their intuitive fluency is put under too much pressure to work efficiently or authentically. Paul Goodman reminds us that speech and writing cannot be exploratory and heuristic when anxiety keeps people from risking losing themselves in temporary confusion (Goodman, 1966). But confusion is a necessary, functional component of invention. Here chaos can be a prelude to clarity, suggesting that we didn't know what we thought in the first place. How many young writers turn in English as a sane solution to defending a thesis statement they never believed in? How many of them have no awareness of their ambiguities because they have no clear sense of what they are trying to say? An important function of invention, then, is to help writers understand themselves.

If students feel they are to adhere to specific prearranged criteria, their energies shift to successfully completing that task (Pianko, 1979). Cut off from their intuition, they turn in Themewriting: correct maps of an empty territory. The themes are so depressing to read because we sense the irony: these rhetorical essays are often our own fault. We have confused students with our contradictory signals. We ask for authentic, committed prose, written in a human voice about ideas and experiences that matter, but in our texts, our classrooms, and our comments on papers, we often focus so insistently on arrangement and style that students cannot really be blamed for slighting content and commitment in favor of safe sentences and neat arrangements.

I used to wonder why students wrote the research paper in such a remote, wooden voice, in a persona quite distant from the rhythm and confidence of their talk. They were, I see now, constructing, not composing. Only part of their brain was engaged, the logical, orderly, sequential-half:

the half that develops, not the half that imagines and discovers. I was getting what James Britton calls, "dummy runs for an examiner" (Britton *et al.*, 1975). I'm afraid we've been getting what we asked for.

To avoid some of this, writing should be as natural as talk, not as mysterious and structured as logic. It is hard to be insincere if we have to write continuously, spontaneously. This kind of writing can be an effective bridge between the expressive fluency of talk and composing an expository essay. Our intuitive competence and confidence in speech is an invaluable yet little used resource for all writers. When engaged in non-threatening situations, intuition helps us discover and complete our thoughts, and fulfill the expectations raised in earlier sentences.

In fact, because speech and writing are not completely governed by the conscious mind, forming at the point of utterance can be a built-in heuristic, enabling us not only to form and order our ideas, but also to create a new reality, a fresh perspective. But for this to happen, the writer must be free to follow possibilities this way and that. Little can be discovered in these early stages if the writer is trying to stick to topic sentences. Young writers should understand that E. M. Foster's seemingly flippant remark, "How do I know what I mean until I see what I say?" is really a rejoinder to our profession's traditional notion that writers need to know and plan before writing. The opposite, it seems to me, is more productive: we write to help ourselves know and plan.

The six focused free-writings I gave my students earlier helped them clarify their ideas. Because they wrote quickly and from various perspectives, they often ended up in unplanned positions that surprised and intrigued them. Besides eliciting a reasonable authentic voice, these tentative explorations uncovered a wealth of half-digested ideas on superstition, folklore, and rumor. Initially caught up in Eiseley's narrative skill, many believed the frog metamorphosis was

possible. Although a part of them wanted to suspend disbelief, another more logical and rational part was skeptical. I would speculate that because writing is more concrete and more linear than thinking or speaking, my students were nudged into a clarifying dialogue with themselves about received opinions and individual belief.

To accommodate their thinking, to give shape to emerging ideas, most writers created intuitive patterns of cause and effect, analysis, narration, and comparison and contrast. These rhetorical modes and structures emerged because these forms evolve naturally as solutions to externalizing thought. Form did not need to be imposed. In these pieces, inexperienced writers were already employing the structures and patterns in our texts intuitively. Even in invention there was an arrangement. First the writing generates form, then it can be regularized and ordered in a later stage.

The composing process is, after all, an organic process: one that flows from our innate ability, perhaps even our need, to symbolize and organize. As Frank D'Angelo writes, "The subconscious mind usually provides the design for the composing process, and the conscious mind provides its development" (D'Angelo, 1975, 53). And, from another angle, Kenneth Burke notes: "You can't possibly make a statement without its falling into some sort of pattern" (Burke, 1950, 65). Not only can students discover what to say with focused, multi-faceted free writing, they can also discover an incipient discourse structure which can be seen as an external manifestation of an intuitive thought process.

Expressive writing is, as Kinneavy notes, psychologically prior to other aims (Kinneavy, 1971). To help each other negotiate this transition, students gave descriptive feedback that enabled writers to begin the process of turning their expressive writing into transactional prose. In this way, students began to see their prose move from the private to the public,

from writer-based to reader-based. But first, writers need to understand their own minds. And for this, a seemingly structureless form works best because it is the most accessible and the most natural. And since students make changes in rhetorical stance every day as they talk to classmates, professors, lovers, and parents, the transition from expressive to transactional is made easier in the supportive, oral context of small groups.

In fact the whole environment of composing needs to be as supportive and encouraging as possible. Because of the intimate connections between identity and language, I wonder if our teaching can be thought of as just a matter of personal style anymore. Verbal intuition does not respond well to the criticism or constraint that emerged from a psychologically unsophisticated school tradition. From what we now know about writing apprehension, it seems counter-intuitive to still be grading essays, taking off for this and that, lecturing about logic and grammar, and generally being an examiner.

Taking students through a composing sequence that values and encourages incubation and growth can help to lessen writing apprehension because the writer now knows when in the composing process one needs structure, when one should be self-conscious about paragraph coherence, about style, about editing and proofreading. This sense of ordered control prevents inhibiting and premature consciousness of form and allows the writer freedom to say something worth the effort.

Since research indicates that inexperienced writers truncate their composing sequence, often eliminating invention and revision, it is valuable for them to behave like good writers (Stallard, 1974). Turning the chaos of free writing into edited essays a dozen times a semester enables writers to experience in a conscious, orderly way the stages of the composing process.

We all want our students to compose coherent, articulate prose, writing that

means something, that springs from some inner wish to communicate and create. I am encouraged by the balanced writing that emerges when intuition is enlisted and exploited, when the dreamer and the doer merge. And intuition doesn't have to be learned, it is there already, for everybody, a surprising, fertile resource for teachers and students.

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Legal Writing for Composition

TEACHING A COURSE in rhetoric or argumentative prose to freshmen should be challenging, invigorating, and rewarding; however, the course is often unsatisfactory when the students and the teacher understand rhetoric differently. Aristotle divided rhetoric into three categories: deliberative (counsel or advice), epideictic (generally, praise or blame), and forensic (attack or defense in legal matters). Much of the dissatisfaction with freshman courses in argumentative prose stems from a confusion between the teacher's assignments and the students' interpretations of them. Many instructors expect something deliberative from their students, but receive epideictic papers instead. The rhetorical situation is awkward: it is very difficult to ask an eighteen year old to advise and counsel someone presumably much more knowledgeable and experienced. The students, sensing this unnaturally contrived arrangement, seek to advise on matters in which they are "authorities" (dorm living, institutional food, or rock groups), or they transform the deliberative papers into epideictic papers and praise or blame topics (inflation is bad but conserving energy is good).¹

Moreover, students cannot learn from prose examples in the "reader" because the examples, while composed of fine writing, are frequently too sophisticated in their command of the issues, too dated in time, or too far removed from the students' concerns to elicit genuinely interested responses from the students. (How many students, after reading Orwell, are

really interested in the effect of politics on the English language and want to write a paper about the effect?) Students, feeling they must say something "important" about a "significant" subject, tend to produce fuzzy arguments about very general issues. When marked down to a C- for a vague paper on "Inflation," the student complains that he or she was marked down because the teacher did not agree with the student's views. When marked down to a D+ for unsupported arguments about "Abortion," the student complains that he or she should not be expected to produce a term paper in 500 words or has not yet been taught how to properly document sources.

These problems grow from the average student's inability to handle the *topoi* or subjects of deliberative discourse. On the one hand, the teacher gets discouraged because the students apparently cannot master the basics of argumentative prose and avoid nasty generalizations or *ad hominem* arguments. On the other hand, the students see the instructor as demanding work which is not only artificial, but, more importantly, beyond their capabilities. A solution to this problem in rhetorics would be to choose the Aristotelian *via media* and use forensic rhetoric or Legal Writing as the basis of an argumentative prose course. This would allow the teacher to select the proper subjects or *topoi* for the students' argumentative efforts so that the students can write well-argued papers about specific topics in which the arguments are well supported but extensive research is not required.

Before there are loud protestations about the impossibility of instantly turning C- students into trial lawyers,

let me limit my argument by defining Legal Writing and stating that this approach will not work for all freshman students. By Legal Writing, I do not mean such complex items as codes, wills, deeds, contracts, *amicus curiae* briefs, or any other generally recognized official legal writing. Instead, I am thinking of the kind of writing done to answer examinations in law school—but on a much simpler level. Such writing usually involves applying a specific set of legal principles (rules of law) to a set of facts (case).

For example, consider the following principles and set of facts from Norman Brand and John White's *Legal Writing*:

Stan was a member of the Middletown Police Department, working as an undercover policeman. He was contacted by Ollie, who suggested they hold up the neighborhood liquor store. Both man [sic] entered the liquor store together. Stan pointed a gun at the owner of the liquor store and handed him a note which read: "I am a police officer. Hand me your money and pretend this is a robbery. I will return the money later." The owner did as he had been instructed, and the two men left. Half an hour later Stan came back and returned the money. [Given the two principles below] was Ollie guilty of being an accomplice to a robbery?...

An "accomplice" is someone who is (a) present at the scene of a crime, and (b) aiding, or (c) available to aid, the perpetrator of the crime...

"Robbery" [is] (a) the taking of (b) the property of another, (c) through a threat of force, (d) with

Thomas Sawyer is a member of the Department of Languages and Literature, Northern Montana College.

The "Law School Formula" for Legal Arguments

- | | |
|---|---|
| I | Determine the ISSUE |
| R | Determine the relevant RULES of law |
| A | APPLY the rules to the particular situation |
| C | Reach a CONCLUSION which answers the question |

the intent to permanently deprive him of that property.²

Clearly, such a problem is not suited for every student in freshman English, but it is not beyond the scope of many composition courses either, for the skills required to answer such a question are precisely the skills most instructors try to cultivate in a course in argumentative prose. Before a student can begin to formulate the argument about Ollie's role as accomplice in a robbery, the student will have to demonstrate his or her thinking ability. For instance, the student must be able to read perceptively and answer a number of initial questions before tackling the major question. First, the student must be able to understand the legal principles involved. For example, can a person who is at the scene of a crime, but not actively contributing to the commission of a crime, be considered an accomplice? Second, the student must be able to determine how the question relates to the case and the relationship between the rules of law. For example, Ollie cannot be said to be an accomplice unless it is first determined that a robbery has actually taken place. Faulty reasoning at this point can ruin the most carefully crafted argument. Third, the student must be able to determine what facts are relevant to the case. For example, is the fact that Ollie proposed the robbery relevant? Is the fact that Stan returned the money relevant? Of course, the teacher may test the

students further by muddying the facts with unnecessary and irrelevant evidence and by adding two or three unnecessary principles.

Having clearly and dispassionately analyzed the facts and principles, the student must then answer the question, that is, construct a sound argument. As Dwight Stevenson says,

The student, clerk, attorney, and judge, must all be able to construct arguments which apply general principles of law to particular instances and thereby reach persuasive conclusions. They must bring together their abilities to state what the law is, to narrate facts, to isolate determinative issues and thus accomplish the larger persuasive purpose to which most legal discourse is ultimately put: to convince specific audiences of the soundness of legal judgment.³

The great advantage such arguments have over conventional argumentative papers is, as Stevenson says, the necessity of combining general principles and particular instances. Students cannot plead ignorance of documentation procedures nor can they complain about having to support statements with statistical evidence, for none is required. Students may still complain about the teacher not agreeing with their views, but the vague paper which only states a problem rather than arguing a view should be banished by this system.

The teacher easily should be able to show students that arguments that wander from the subject, that develop illogically, and that reach the wrong conclusion receive lower grades.

In fact, the method for producing legal arguments for such combinations of facts and principles is fairly straightforward and simple. It is so well known in law schools that it has an acronym, IRAC (Issue, Rule, Application, and Conclusion). In other words, to formulate an argument, the student must determine the Issue (usually the question asked, but not always; was Ollie guilty of being an accomplice to a robbery?), determine the Rules of law (the principles) that are relevant, Apply the Rules to the particular situation (the Facts), and reach a Conclusion which answers the question. Failure to correctly connect the general principles to the particular situation by writing only about the theory of the principles, by only restating the facts, or by applying the wrong principles to the facts results in an inadequate, insufficient answer.

In Brand's and White's case of the alleged accomplice, a student would have to consider the Issue, the Rules, and the Application before he or she reached a Conclusion. The Issue is the question, which can only be answered by determining how the principles apply to the facts. Ollie can be an accomplice to a robbery only if a robbery took place. If Stan, the police officer, instructed the liquor store owner to "pretend" a robbery was taking place and informed the owner that the money would be returned later, can the particular situation which occurred be considered a robbery by the definition of robbery given earlier? If the student concludes that a robbery did take place, then the student must determine if Ollie's actions at the scene of the alleged crime fit the definition of an accomplice. Thus, this fairly simple case exemplifies the general principles of all legal decisions: a well-reasoned argument must apply the general principles of the law to a specific example and lead to a logical and persuasive conclusion.

Of course, the set of given facts can be selected by the teacher to make the assignment more or less demanding. The teacher can easily pour in a number of irrelevant facts, and thus require more effort by the student to determine the facts relevant to the principles. To approximate the difficulties of some cases, the teacher may also deliberately omit facts and, consequently, force the students to infer needed ideas from the given facts. For example, in assault and battery cases, much can be done with the physical descriptions of the principals, which will allow the student to infer conclusions about possible harm, self-defense and so forth. The teacher also may complicate matters by having two or more wrongs committed in one set of facts and have the wrongs be independent of each other or one dependent on the other. Also the teacher may present a case, such as the following, in which the same act may be construed as both right and wrong, depending upon the concept of privilege.

Sam Suntan, a young doctor, was taking a break from his duties as an intern and relaxing at the city swimming pool. Suddenly, he heard calls for help. He saw a teenage girl pointing to the body of her brother at the bottom of the pool. Sam quickly dove in and pulled out the unconscious child.

While kneeling beside and administering mouth-to-mouth artificial respiration to the unconscious child, Sam was bothered by someone leaning over him and pushing on his shoulders. He told the person to move, but neither she nor anyone else in the crowd moved. Finding it difficult to perform artificial respiration in this manner, Sam reached up and pushed the person leaning on him backwards out of the way. When Sam pushed the pool lifeguard, the lifeguard slipped on the wet tiles and broke her leg.

The lifeguard threatens to charge Sam with battery because she says that she, as a trained

lifeguard, was trying to help Sam, but the crush of the crowd made it difficult to move.

Given the principles below, is Sam guilty of battery?

1. A doctor may use all reasonable and necessary means to save a life.
2. A doctor may use only those techniques in which he has been properly trained.
3. Battery is the intentional, unconsented, unprivileged, harmful touching of another.

Making inferences from a given set of facts certainly should exercise a student's critical faculties. Another part of Legal Writing which demands critical thinking on the student's part is the anticipation of counter-arguments. So, in good Legal Writing fashion, let me anticipate some of the objections that teachers may have to using Legal Writing for teaching composition. First, students cannot write sentences, let alone legal briefs. To this I would answer that Legal Writing will not work for all students, and it would be very difficult to use for students who have trouble determining what a sentence is. Second, students know nothing about the law and cannot be expected to become law students overnight. Certainly, students are not expected to become attorneys immediately; and, unless the teacher is a lawyer, both the students and the teacher will probably be relying on a very simple set of legal principles for most of the course. In fact, the legal principles adopted for the course need not be from *Black's Law Dictionary*; Webster's or the paperback *Law Dictionary* by Steven H. Gifis (Woodbury, New York: Barrons, 1975) will do as well and probably even better. By the same answer I can dispose of another potential counter-argument: students, in an attempt to impress the instructor with technical terms, may inflate their papers with legal jargon that they do not really know how to use. The teacher will get as much legal jargon as he or she indicates is desirable.

I can also foresee an experienced composition teacher objecting not to

the reasoning required of the student, but to the kind of writing the student would do in the course. In a Legal Writing composition course, when would a student be able to compose papers with introductions, bodies, and conclusions? The very notion of writing almost the equivalent of law school examination answers is different from teaching a student to write a conventional 500 word paper. Why should a coherent 500 word paper necessarily or ideally be the goal of a composition course? In some ways the 500 word paper is a more artificial assignment to the students than the IRAC structured argument. For the students and the teacher, Legal Writing simply establishes a very definite context and clarifies the purpose of writing.

Although the instructor may see the purpose in the individual assignments for Legal Writing, he or she may wonder about the background required of the instructor. A legal background is not really necessary in creating interesting and challenging cases for the student to argue. Someone with good legal training may be inclined to choose cases that are too complex or too technical for many students. White and Brand conclude, "While instructors who want to teach [Legal Writing] cannot simply teach it as a kind of Freshman English for bright students, they can teach it with their present understanding of writing."⁴ An instructor can find or modify situations that are reported daily in the newspaper. Or an instructor can borrow some controversial cases from a few years ago, such as Bakke, Marvin, or Weber, and rewrite them for the purposes of the class assignments. As a general guideline, I would avoid complex corporate cases and stick to fairly concise civil or criminal cases. Brand and White's *Legal Writing* would be an excellent source for someone seeking examples of good cases.

Although developing class assignments certainly will take more effort on the part of the teacher, the rewards, in terms of student involvement, far outweigh the costs in time. Students

become enthusiastically involved and argue passionately, indeed almost violently, for a judgment in a case. Of course, the teacher may arrange several methods for using Legal Writing in the classroom. An immediate possibility is to have several students or another section of the composition course function as a jury and weigh the merits of the arguments, especially the ones that develop from deliberately neutral or ambiguous sets of facts. Thus, the power of the student's arguments rests on the actual suasion achieved. The importance of anticipating counterarguments and the significance of the connotations of words can be easily realized by the students if the teacher has them fashion pro and con arguments for one case.

Regardless of the innovative techniques that can be used for teaching Legal Writing, some of the benefits of using Legal Writing seem to be less tangible. Rather than bewildering the students with legal terminology and potentially complicated logical steps, Legal Writing, I think, engenders in the student a healthier respect for the amount of reasoning involved in the legal process. Legal Writing also stresses the importance of objective analysis and a clear understanding of the situation before the development of an argument about that situation. The use of language to achieve a desired end can also be taught. More importantly, Legal Writing compels a student to understand, analyze, and even create a relationship between the particular instance and the general

rule, which is one of the prime criteria for sound logical reasoning.

NOTES

¹For discussions of the relationship between classical rhetoric and contemporary composition courses see the following: Edward P. J. Corbett *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) and John H. Mackin, *Classical Rhetoric for Modern Discourse*, (New York: Free Press, 1969).

²*Legal Writing: The Strategy of Persuasion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), pp. 133-34.

³"Rhetoric and Law: Designing a Program in Communication for Law Students," *College Composition and Communication*, 29 (February, 1978), p.33.

"Composition for the Pre-Professional: Focus on Legal Writing," *College Composition and Communication*, 27 (February, 1976), pp. 41-42.

Forthcoming Special Issues and the Publishing Schedule for *The English Record*

The editors of *The English Record*, while continuing to accept articles on all topics related to English, are calling for papers on two special topics in 1981:

The English Teacher and the Law will be the theme of the Spring issue. The editors are seeking articles about such topics as licensing, accountability, competency testing, censorship, and the copyright law.

Theory into Practice: practical applications of theories of teaching literature and composition. Of special interest would be descriptions of curricula based on comprehensive theories such as those of James Moffett, James Kinneavy, and Geraldine Murphy.

Including these two thematic issues, the complete schedule for 1981 is as follows:

Winter - general

Spring - The English Teacher and Law

Summer - Theory into Practice

Fall - student writing

The editors will also attempt to publish on a fairly strict schedule. The following are mailing dates for each issue:

Winter - March 15

Spring - June 15

Summer - September 15

Fall - December 15

Under normal circumstances, final decisions on the contents of an issue are made ten weeks before the mailing date. However, articles are accepted or rejected within a short time after receipt, so an issue may be "filled up" at an even earlier date.

News and other material for the NYSEC Newsletter or for fillers will be accepted until one month before the mailing date.

Basic Skills in English and the Training of Teachers

THROUGHOUT THIS conference weekend the same old questions, What is English? and How do we study it? are being debated. I do not propose to deal with those questions in my few moments here. Suffice it to say that what most of us are doing with pupils in the English classroom *is not* working. We are not graduating students who understand the workings of their mother tongue, who read for pleasure and information, and who communicate in an organized and reasonably clear manner, orally and in writing. At least we are not graduating them in sufficient numbers to consider ourselves successful.

We hear many reasons and excuses for this state of affairs. Students are not motivated. They are infected by hopelessness and alienation and anomie. They live in a non-print, non-script world, characterized by electronic visual images on TV or cinema screens, aural rock explosions, even drug-induced hallucinations. All of this may be happening, but the Regents Competency tests, as an expression of public concern over growing illiteracy, are forcing us to be accountable for the literacy of our pupils no matter what is happening around us.

Let me begin by sharing with you my own prejudices about basic skills. *First*, I believe that the primary responsibility of teachers of English is to teach literacy—language, literature

and composition. How to achieve this goal is still subject to debate among English teachers—and that is one of our problems.

Second, I believe that the children of working-class, Black, Hispanic, urban, rural, or other poor people are as capable of using and enjoying the many aspects of language as are children of middle-class, suburban, or otherwise affluent people. But it is these pupils who are falling below the statewide reference points in vast numbers on the competency tests. If the children of the poor are not as a group as successful in reading, writing, and speaking, it is our fault as teachers as a profession. "We have met the enemy," as Pogo once said, "and he is us."

Third, I believe that in order for human beings to speculate on the nature of man, they must first master the *basic tool* that enables us to think. That tool is language. Without language we *cannot* think. Without the ability to perceive the language of others, visually or tactily through reading, aurally through listening, we cannot measure our perceptions against the perceptions of others. To me basic skills are precisely those skills being measured, however imperfectly, with competency tests. Our preliminary experience with those tests demonstrates—if we need any confirmation—that thousands of pupils are scoring far below competency level in reading and writing.

Either we have set goals that are unreachable or we have not learned how to reach the goals we have set. In either case, from their entry into school until their dropping out or graduation, thousands upon thousands of children

have wasted their time and our time except to provide us with a living as educators.

I am being deliberately harsh in saying this, but I believe it. Whether it is because we expect less of children than they are capable of achieving or less of ourselves than we are capable of, we are not teaching children to achieve a workable level of competency in that one attribute which separates us humans from the apes, our command of language.

As a result we are obliged to conduct competency tests to force us to begin to do our job. We are obliged to plan individually prescribed instructional remedies for those pupils who fail them. For many students we are going to have to find time within our secondary school schedule for at least 3 periods per week of remediation, taught in some cases by the same teachers who were unsuccessful the first time around. We are going to have to trade in elective courses for required courses in reading and writing. We will need to change our notions of what teaching English, means.

I doubt that anyone could have anticipated, when this conference was planned, just how serious the lack of writing competence in New York State really is. We now know that compared to all of the students enrolled in grades 3, 9, and 10, 19.6% of those who actually took the Preliminary Competency Test (PCT) in writing in the spring of 1979 scored below the statewide reference point. The ratio excludes students who were absent or tardy on test day, a group that contains many more failing students. The reading performance statewide is somewhat better, but still poor. In

Harvey R. Granite is Coordinator of Urban Funded Programs for the Rochester Public Schools. A slightly different version of this paper was presented at the 1979 NYSEC convention.

urban areas, such as my district, performance was worse.

The state requirements for competency in reading and writing have not, of course, achieved full flower yet. The PCT's are designed to diagnose a student's difficulties in reading, writing, and mathematics early so that pupils who fall below the statewide reference point can be provided with remedial instruction. In June 1982, when all students are expected to pass either the Regents Comprehensive examination or the Regents Competency Tests (RCT's) in reading and writing to graduate, we will begin to see the real meaning of student failure on a mass scale. The relatively easy Basic Competency Tests (BCT's) will have given way to a writing test which preliminary experience tells us will be at least as difficult as the Regents Comprehensive. The 1980 crop of seniors can still graduate by passing the BCT, and many juniors are still postponing their ultimate tests of writing competency. In two years, however, only the RCT or Comprehensive will be acceptable for graduation. *As a profession, we are in trouble.*

We know that it is unlikely that we are going to be able to turn around in a year what appears to be an accumulating trend toward illiteracy. While reading scores on the PCT's are generally better than those for writing, we are all too familiar with the inability of many students to cope with the literature appropriate to their age levels and interests. The writing problem is far worse. During the past decade most colleges have given at least minimal attention to training English teachers to teach reading. Most English teachers are now required to have courses in reading for certification. Although many secondary school teachers of English still resist teaching high school reading classes, enough good teaching materials are on the market now to help even the most reluctant teacher to provide poor readers with a comprehensive and sequential reading program.

There is little evidence, however, to suggest that we are training future

English teachers to write or to teach writing—which ought to make up nearly a third of the total time spent in English class. On the contrary, the evidence seems to be that English majors receive no more training in writing than do science majors or mathematics majors and in some cases even less. They may have more aptitude for writing, but English teachers who have learned to write by instinct often have a great deal of difficulty in explaining to a bewildered tenth grader just how it's done.

My own research, conducted in the early 70's, suggests that many English teachers have had even less direct instruction in the craft of writing than did some of their fellow alumni of the last dozen years or so. In the mid-60's our colleges were crowded. There was a shortage of instructors. Since most college English faculty detested teaching freshman English and were working to reduce their teaching loads from 12 hours to 9 or even 6, it seemed appropriate to begin by excusing talented or able students, many of them English majors, from freshman composition.

But it was in these courses that students learned expository writing, often short pieces of 300-500 words each, three to five paragraphs, presented every week. Many of the composition courses took apart models of prose writing, taught the fundamentals of inductive and deductive reasoning, studied examples of propaganda techniques, slanted writing, the techniques of argument. Often writing was done under time pressure in class. By moving directly to "sophomore" English survey courses with their long term papers and emphasis on literary research and criticism, many English majors actually had less time to learn the kind of general expository writing we expect of high school students than did students who were not excused from freshman composition. As a result, many English teachers today do little more with composition than circle misspelling and mechanical errors and encourage their students to try harder.

Therefore, *my first recommendation* is that we work to require that every English major take a *full six hours of composition* taught by a specialist (even if they are not going to teach in high school, because many others will become college teachers who will teach future high school teachers). We should also require evidence of *writing* competence from every prospective English teacher, both impromptu writing and writing prepared as if for publication. Teacher certification in New York State should require training and evidence of expertise in written composition.

Unhappily, even if such requirements of colleges were to be established tomorrow, it would take five years or more before the present generation of English majors were to be prepared adequately to teach composition. More important, we will still have the great majority of English teachers still in the classroom, relatively untrained. What do we do for them? Whether they have been trained to teach composition or not, the evidence from the SAT's, the Regents, employers, and the PCT's all indicates that many, if not most, of our English teachers are not teaching basic literacy skills, particularly writing, very successfully. There are other major gaps in the preparation of English teachers who are expected to teach written composition. Spelling, punctuation, syntax, grammar cannot be taught effectively without a basic knowledge of the English language. Another 25% to 30% of the English program should be concerned with English language and linguistics. How many of our teachers have had linguistic training, general language theory, or work specifically with the English language and its semantics, syntax, philology?

What about oral language? Our reading and writing problems are most severe in urban centers where oral language is particularly rich and varied. We can teach written composition better when we teach students about the power of the spoken word. Our urban teachers need background in the special problems of regional and

ethnic dialects of English.

All in all, the training of future secondary school teachers of English, rooted almost exclusively in the 17th century metaphysical poets, 18th century neo-classicists, the 19th century romantics and Victorians on both sides of the ocean, the Americans and the Britons of the 1920's and 30's and 40's, is going to have to be brought in line with the needs of American youth of the 1980's if we are to work our way out of our problem.

My second recommendation is that we begin to retrain the thousands of English teachers already in classrooms throughout the state in language and composition. It is time for the same Board of Regents who instituted competency tests and who are threatening high schools with loss of accreditation to provide the funds for this retraining.

I don't believe that the answer is to fight the competency tests, but to have them work for us to improve the present low state of reading and writing performance in the State. The alternative is to try to keep things as

they are by various ploys—

Fudging on the writing test evaluations.

Encouraging pupils from oppressed groups to overturn competency requirements for graduations, as has already happened in Florida.

Pointing our finger at factors outside of our control - society, television, parents.

Lowering the level of the tests again.

Such approaches would only hurt children and would prevent us from correcting the problems that the competency test movement has uncovered. Instead let us look at the projected outcome of the tests.

We are warned that in 1981, high schools with less than 85% passing the RCT's will be denied accreditation. That means the principals are accountable, which means the teachers of English are accountable.

Will principals be demanding evidence of weekly writing instruction and paper evaluation?

Will department heads be requiring

evidence of sequential writing programs, grade by grade, emphasizing but not limited to the kinds of writing found on PCT's and RCT's?

Will the Regents demand that the Bureau of English consult with Educational Testing Service and the College Entrance Examination Board, with colleges, with writers, with successful teachers of writing, before reinventing the wheel of scoring standardized writing?

Will the Regents demand that funds be assigned specifically to training and retraining teachers of English whose skills and knowledge have gaps? Will teachers also require competency tests in writing?

The answers to these questions will determine just how serious everyone is in the student competency movement. For my part I look forward to genuine accountability in the 1980's. I think it's the only way in which we are going to teach what youth have to know if they are going to survive in a world that places more and more power in the hands of skillful manipulators of written and spoken language. ■

In Anticipation of the New York State Competency Test in Reading

For tall Jimmy, a reader disabled,
A CLOZE test was placed on the table,
In despair, his voice rose,
"What the _____ is this CLOZE?!"
Read this stuff, fill them in, I'm unable."

So Jim yelled to the teacher, "It's a bummer!
My diploma's at stake, Am I dumber?"
Said the teacher, "Don't despair,
I know it's not fair—
But you'll take READING LAB in the summer."

—Elaine Sherman
Jamaica Learning Center
Jamaica, New York

SERENDIPITY

Yes I Can!

or

What I Learned in the First Grade

Doris M. Quick

MY COLLEAGUE THREW down the gauntlet. "Will you come and teach my first grade class?" She smiled, invitingly, but I sensed a challenge.

"OK" I said. I had to say OK, didn't I? We had been talking in a meeting of ways to increase writing practice for all our students. I mentioned free writing a la Peter Elbow (*Writing Without Teachers*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

"But first graders can't do that. They don't know the words."

"Let them invent the words. Or draw pictures."

"Sounds great. But my first graders can't do it."

We set a date for Friday at 10 a.m. That gave me three days to figure out what I could do. I tried to think if I knew any first graders. I'd been teaching in senior high school so long. My own two children must have been first graders once, but who remembers?

My husband, who used to be an elementary principal, gave me advice. "Establish a friendship with them. Don't just go in there and start your lesson. Get to know them first as people." Good. I made a mental note.

The lesson started to take shape in my mind. Each child would be given three pieces of paper, a variety of pencils and crayons, and an orange. One page would be thinking paper, the other two for a more presentable piece of writing—two pages to encourage productivity. On thinking paper, we would write freely about something concrete—oranges. I would bring oranges, and we would touch and free write, putting all the words, drawings, squiggles that came to mind on the thinking paper, not pausing, for one full minute by the clock. Then we would cut open the orange, smell and free write, then free associate people and places and free write, finally taste and free write. Looking over all the thinking paper, we'd choose words and ideas to include in a writing to show to the teacher and me. It seemed like it might work.

I arrived at the appointed room at the appointed time carrying a tote bag of supplies. My colleague had wisely printed each child's name on a card on his desk. I wouldn't have thought of that. So we had a place to begin. I asked them about themselves. They told me *everything* about their sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, pets and hobbies. They

Doris Quick is English Department Head at Burnt Hills High School, Burnt Hills, New York. She also serves as in-service coordinator for the Capital District Writing Project.

were very polite, raising their hands and talking one at a time until they got excited. Then they kneeled on their chairs and leaned all the way forward, or jumped up beside their desks, their arms extended, flailing the air, begging to be called on. Time to move into the lesson.

"Boys and girls, do you know lots of words?"

"Yes." Confident. Certain. No question about it.

"Can you write lots of words?"

"Yes, I can!" accompanied by vigorous up and down wagging of twenty-four heads. Not a doubt in their minds.

"Would you like to do some writing today?" What if they said "No"?

Ah, but most assuredly they did want to write today.

So we, their teacher and I, distributed supplies. She had a marvelously efficient system. We have so much to learn from our colleagues. I explained that we would not talk, but would examine the orange for twenty seconds and then keep our pencils or crayons moving for one minute by the clock. And they did it. It was absolutely silent. I wrote with them, so I wasn't watching, but they seemed attentive to the task.

At the end of the minute they asked me to spell words—terrific words like bumpy, grapefruit, pumpkin. I wrote them on the board, but that was a mistake, for some students relied on the blackboard rather than inventing their own words. We went through each of the planned free writing exercises filling up the thinking page and pausing to discuss.

"Does the smell make you think of any special place?"

"Yes. Mississippi."

"Why Mississippi?"

"Because I ate an orange there once."

"Oh."

Finally we were ready to choose ideas to write on good paper. I intended that each child work independently and come to me when he had questions, a classroom-as-conference center. Then I could ask Kathy, for instance, when she ate an orange in Mississippi, how old she was, why she remembers the event. It didn't work that way. They all wanted to talk to their teacher and me at once, so they raced to the finish-line rather than developed their ideas. This part, then, should have been done on another day and students should be given direction and practice in conferencing.

Another error was my not specifying, at least as a suggestion for those who couldn't get started, an audience and purpose. I might have asked them, for instance, to describe an orange for someone who had never

experienced one. As it was, they wrote, not unexpectedly, to me or to no one in particular. If I had required a particular response, however, Kathy would not have been able to make her free-association with Mississippi.

Was I pleased with the lesson? Yes. It showed me that first graders can free write because they think they can. Their products were unique and delightful. There were lots of errors, of course, but these can be cleaned up at a later stage, the editing stage of the writing process.

I liked Matthew's picture of an orange that was bigger than the tree next to it. He wrote:

The ornge feels sawft.

it smels good

it smels so good

I tink I'm going to eat it and it tastes good to and I ate it.

It makes my lips sore.

Kathy had a very abstract representation of the map of the Mississippi delta. When I told her I liked her writing, she glowed with unabashed pleasure. She wrote:

This is mississippi

river in

Mississi ppi.

It is

fantasti c.

I noticed that Michael used an apostrophe correctly twice:

I like colcks.

it's soft and

kolwd. it's smly.

it smls good and it's

orange.

I asked him how he knew to put the mark there, hoping his explanation would illuminate the rules for contractions for those eagerly standing around him.

"Because it belongs there." And that was that.

What did I learn in first grade? That first graders are lovable, malleable, confident, short people. Somewhere inside of my toughest senior high student lurks a former first grader. How can I touch that confident "yes, I can!" attitude? ■

Cohesion in Writing: A Review for Teachers

SCENE: THE GOON SHOW

[An old man comes on stage and begins:]

And so then the first one said to the other... [audience laughter]

• • •

The last verse of an old song (read aloud):

The man who has plenty of red-ripe-strawberry shortcake

And giveth his neighbor none,

He sha'n't have any of my red-ripe-strawberry shortcake

When his red-ripe-strawberry shortcake is gone.

• • •

These two passages have something important to do with writing well in English. That something has a name — *cohesion*, a term which we all use but whose meaning most of us have only a vague notion of, especially when it comes to being able to teach our students how to produce it in their writing. Cohesion is a term which we will be hearing more about soon, though. In the last four years it has become the center of one area of research, and the findings of some of this research promise to be very useful to the teaching of English composition. In this article I want to describe what one important pair of researchers mean by cohesion and then discuss some of the research pertaining to cohesion which already appears to be relevant to teaching writing.

The two researchers who have provided the catalyst for the present flurry of research in cohesion are British linguists M.A.K. Halliday and Rusqaya Hasan, authors of *Cohesion in English* (1976). In this book Halliday and Hasan define cohesion in such a way as to distinguish it from other organizational and linguistic factors of texts.¹ Then, under five categories of cohesive relationships

possible in a text, they list and discuss the means which the English language has for making a text cohesive. They also provide a system for analyzing the total cohesion of a text.

According to Halliday and Hasan, cohesion is that aspect of a passage more than one sentence in length which creates in the reader or hearer of the passage the impression that the passage is "a unified whole" not "just a collection of unrelated sentences."² To be specific, cohesion occurs "where interpretation of an item in the discourse requires making reference to some other item in the discourse."³ In other words cohesion has to do with how writers adjust their writing to account for what has gone before in a text and what will follow. The paragraph below illustrates (items which mark cohesive relationships are printed in bold face):

Jack thought that he saw how to extricate himself. **He** took a piece of string and tied it carefully around the neck of the bottle. **Then he** passed **the other end of the string** over a branch and weighted **the whole apparatus** down with a stone. **This** presented him with **another problem, however**, and although **he** knew how to solve it, he wasn't sure that **he wanted to**.

Cohesion is realized by pronouns, repeated noun phrases, vocabulary items in collocation, verbal and clausal ellipses, and conjunctions and transition words (conjunctive adverbs). These markers enable the writer to refer to an entity under discussion more than once without confusion (See **he, it, this, the string, the whole apparatus** in the passage above). They also make it possible for writers to reduce redundancies in text while still reiterating a common meaning (for example, **he wanted to** rather than **he wanted to solve it** above), and they enable the writer to make explicit the logical, temporal, and spatial relationships between events or arguments in a text (see **however** and **then** above).

It is important to distinguish between cohesion and other kinds of continuity in a text. First of all, cohesion concerns only the linguistic aspects of continuity. Cohesion is not the same as continuity of subject matter, also called *coherence*⁴ or, as the phrase goes, sticking to the subject. Continuity of subject matter can occur without cohesion, as the two examples at the beginning of this article illustrate. Both these examples are coherent; that is,

Nancy Hottel-Burkhart is a graduate student in applied linguistics, the Foreign Language Education Center, University of Texas at Austin. She has taught English as a second language, and her dissertation, a study of cohesion in the English-language essays of native speakers of other languages, is nearly completed.

there is no evidence that the speaker confuses us by changing the subject abruptly. Nevertheless, neither of the two examples is properly cohesive: one assumes too much knowledge on the listener's part, and the other assumes too little.

Secondly, the continuity provided by sentence structure or T-unit structure is eliminated from consideration in the study of cohesion. This is because cohesion has to do with connections between items which are in different sentences. It is true that such phenomena as pronominalization and conjunction occur within as well as across sentences. However, since grammarians have already thoroughly described within-sentence relationships and since sentence structure provides its own kind of cohesion, students of cohesion look at the broader-scope relationships across sentences.⁵

To date the study of cohesion has resulted in at least three kinds of information which help us in teaching composition. The first kind of information relates to pronoun usage in expository texts. The second kind relates to the frequency and purpose of ellipsis and substitution in texts, and the third relates to developmental patterns in students' use of conjunctions and transition words.

Anyone who has ever taught composition has wanted an answer to the question: when should a writer use a pronoun and when should she use a repeated noun? Several linguists are now asking a similar question: how do pronouns and repeated nouns come about in (well-written) texts? One of the answers proposed so far relates to the psychological construct called consciousness. According to this view, when we read or listen to a text, we have a mental picture of the content of the text. Certain objects, persons, or ideas become dominant in the picture, but as we proceed, unless these objects, persons, or ideas are re-introduced or restated in some fashion, they fade from view, or at least from dominance. Wallace Chafe, a psycholinguist, claims that as long as the person writing (or speaking) the text which we are reading (or listening to) can assume that she and the reader have the same entities in consciousness, she will use pronouns every time she mentions these entities; but whenever she has reason to believe that an entity is becoming less than dominant in the reader's consciousness, she will use a noun phrase to reinforce or re-introduce the entity in the noun phrase to bring to consciousness an entity which has not been there before.⁶ This may explain the difference between *it* in sentence 2 and *the string* in sentence 3 in the paragraph about Jack.

John Hinds has gone even further to suggest that paragraph structure determines when pronouns occur and when noun phrases do. Hinds has analyzed expository texts (articles from *Time*, for example) and has proposed the following system of pronoun usage: Each expository paragraph consists of sets of segments of one or more sentences. These segments are in four possible relationships to the paragraph topic. The first segment is

the introduction, and it is followed by the motivation, the highlight, or the unexpected first. Within each segment, there is one sentence which is the high point of interest for that segment. In this peak sentence, whatever entity represents the paragraph topic will be stated in noun-phrase form (in the case of a person, the name of the person will be used). In all other sentences in a segment, unless special emphasis or contrast is needed, this entity will be stated as a pronoun.⁷ Whether or not Chafe and Hinds have hit upon fool-proof ways to avoid ambiguous pronoun reference, the ideas which they propose present us with a very useful method for making students aware of the functions of noun-pronoun variation.

Another interesting aspect of pronoun usage has been described by Charlotte Linde, who analyzed oral descriptions to discover the principles which govern the use of the pronouns *it* and *that*. Linde has found that the choice between *it* and *that* in spoken discourse hinges on whether what is being referenced by the pronoun is in or out of the speaker's focus of attention. This focus of attention may function in the domain of discourse structure, such as the segments which Hinds proposes (in which case we would use *it* for entities under discussion in a particular segment and *that* for entities outside the segment). On the other hand, focus of attention may relate to "the act of speaking itself — statement versus meta-statement."⁸ Apparently *that* is most often used in reference to metastatement, as in this monologue: "He opposed our every move — well, that's not exactly true, he only tried to stop us once." The closest analog of metastatement in writing is the use of *this* to refer to an idea expressed in a whole section of text (sometimes called extended reference or textual reference), an example of which is *this* in our Jack passage above.

Languages seem to vary somewhat in this usage. I have found in my own research in Quebec that when given a passage similar to the Jack passage, native speakers of French use *it* and native speakers of English use *this* for extended reference, at least when the reference to the idea in text is first made. I have also found in studying a small sample of essays of native speakers of English that in the essays of better writers, references to the idea summarized by *this* are accomplished by *it* in mentions subsequent to the first.

The second kind of research in cohesion which has yielded useful information for teaching composition is the analysis of the five different categories of cohesion described by Halliday and Hasan. The five categories are *reference* (which covers the pronoun portion of what has just been discussed above), *lexical cohesion* (which encompasses collocation—choice of vocabulary—and the noun-phrase part of reiteration discussed above), *conjunction* (the use of conjunctions and transition words, discussed below), and *ellipsis* and *substitution*. These last two categories of cohesion are variations of one phenomenon: the use of a word (a substitute) or a blank (an

ellipsis) to stand for a noun phrase, a verb phrase, or a clause previously used in the text. Examples of this phenomenon are **wanted to** (an ellipsis of a verb phrase) in the passage about Jack; **one** and **second** in the Goon Show example above; and the underlined words in the sentence below:

I bought John a red teeshirt, and I bought myself a blue **one**. (noun-phrase substitution)

If you can't find one sister, just ask the other. _____
(noun-phrase ellipsis)

At least three researchers so far have discovered an important fact about substitution and ellipsis in English: substitution and ellipsis occur rarely in written texts. The writers whose texts were studied to reveal this fact included good and poor writers among university freshmen, students of English as a second language at several levels of proficiency, and writers Henry James and Ernest Hemingway.⁹ What this discovery may say to teachers of composition is that we need not emphasize substitution and ellipsis in our teaching of cohesion since even the best writers in English do not make great use of these ploys. At the same time, when we consider the function of ellipsis and substitution, we may see a reason for teaching students how to use ellipsis and substitution strategically. The function of this kind of cohesion is to mark contrasts. This is particularly true of verb-phrase ellipsis and substitution: *This country may not want to increase immigration, but it may have to*. Markers of contrast may serve to draw attention to points in arguments such as counterarguments or summary statements. Further analysis of texts may show whether or not substitution and ellipsis occur most frequently at paragraph boundaries or ends of essays, but the markedness of these kinds of cohesion at least suggests the possibility.

Now we come to the third kind of information about cohesion which may help us in teaching writing: information about how transition words are used in texts. According to Halliday and Hasan, in this category of cohesion there are four kinds of meaning expressed: additive (*and, moreover, in addition*), adversative (*but, nevertheless, however*), causal (*for this reason, therefore*) and temporal (*next, then, in the second place*). Halliday and Hasan distinguish between simple conjunctions—conjunctions with low specificity of meaning and therefore great versatility (*and, but, yet, or, for, so*)—and complex conjunctions—those with very definite meanings and limitations on their occurrence (conjunctive adverbs such as *moreover, however, nevertheless, alternatively, therefore*). They also distinguish between conjunctions and transition words which join the events reported in texts (*soon thereafter, next*) and those which join parts of a text (*incidentally, in the first place, on the other hand*). These last two distinctions amount to how-to and when-to instructions and can be very useful to students in classes of English composition or English as a second language.

The research so far in this area of cohesion has had to

do with the claim found in most books on writing that essays can be improved by the use of transition words. So far, the research in developmental trends suggests that our advice to students about transition words needs to be more specific than it is at present. To begin with, Rita Jeruchimowicz Jeremy has found that there is a continuous increase between the age of four and adulthood in the number of conjunctive adverbs used to express temporal and spatial relationships in certain oral tasks. Jeremy has also reported that these temporal and spatial relationships come to be expressed in a richer, more redundant (in Halliday and Hasan's terms, more complex) fashion as age increases.¹⁰

Lynn Hagen has also studied the use of what he calls transitional devices in the writing of seven year olds, eleven year olds, college students, and professional writers. He has analyzed the use of fourteen different kinds of transitions (mostly conjunctive adverbs) and has found that the number of transitions used relative to the total number of words written does not distinguish college students from professional writers. College students use as many phrases as professional writers when length of essay

Types of Cohesion

REFERENCE

- Prenominals
- Demonstratives and definite articles
- Comparatives

SUBSTITUTION

- Nominal substitutes
- Verbal substitutes
- Clausal substitutes

ELLIPSIS

- Nominal ellipsis
- Verbal ellipsis
- Clausal ellipsis

CONJUNCTION

- Additive
- Adversative
- Causal
- Temporal
- Other
- Intonation

LEXICAL

- Same item
- Synonym or near synonym
- Superordinate
- "General" item
- Collation

—Halliday and Hasan

is considered. Hagen has also discovered that by the age of eleven writers have learned to use twelve of the fourteen categories of transition markers. The task of the student after early junior high school thus seems to be to learn how and when to use the other two categories.¹¹

Even though we might do well in high school teaching to concentrate our teaching of conjunction on these two meanings which students master after the age of twelve, Ilona Henderson has discovered that learning those two meanings may not be our only concern.¹² Henderson asked college freshmen who were considered good readers and an equal number who were considered poor readers to carry out two tasks using conjunction. In the first task, students read passages from which the sentence adverbs had been deleted, and then they replaced these deleted words. In the second task, students wrote short passages in which they used the words which they had chosen as replacements for deletions in the reading passage. Henderson found in her study that, first, for all readers, additive and adversative relationships require more explicit markers than causal or temporal ones. This may be because causal and temporal relationships are often expressed by juxtaposition rather than conjunction. For example in *It rained. We had to cancel the picnic.*, there is an unstated causal relationship. . . . any case, if there are students who need to learn to use conjunctive adverbs, the additive and adversative may be the ones on which we should concentrate our teaching.

Henderson also found that the good readers showed considerably better control over the use of conjunctive adverbs than poor readers did. Errors which the poorer readers made included hypercompensation and breach of register. An example of hypercompensation—the use of conjunctive adverbs when none are needed or the use of too many conjunctive adverbs—is *Moreover, in addition she also should have consulted a lawyer*. An example of breach of register is *heretofore* in the following passage:

We can't get any satisfaction from City Hall. They won't even answer our calls. Heretofore we tried to write to them, but we got no response. . . .

Henderson's and Hagen's findings suggest, first, that in high school we may not need to teach the general principle "Use transition words" but that instead we should focus our teaching of transitions on the few semantic relationships which have not yet been learned. Their findings also suggest that we should teach specific ploys such as "Adversative and additive relationships in particular need to be made explicit" and that poor readers and writers may need help in learning the semantic and situational factors involved in using conjunctive adverbs.

The questions central to Halliday and Hasan's description of cohesion still need to be answered. As I write I know of at least six studies in progress which promise to

help us answer these questions. In the next few years we can expect to see discussions of:

- 1) whether good writers use cohesive ties differently from poor writers:
 - a) whether good writers use more cohesive ties than poor writers,
 - b) whether the average distance between ties varies from good writer to poor,
 - c) whether good writers use certain kinds of cohesion more often than others;
- 2) whether older writers use cohesive ties differently from young writers;
- 3) whether cohesiveness of texts varies with the social class of the writer;
- 4) how much of cohesiveness is a matter of individual style and how much a matter of writer's maturity;
- 5) how the use of cohesion varies from: expository writing to narrative or descriptive writing.

With answers to questions like these as well as the answers which we have now, the systematic teaching of this aspect of good writing may soon come to replace our vague flutterings about that term with the formerly unclear meaning: cohesion.

NOTES

¹I am using the technical term *text* to be fair to my sources. I hope that the reader will feel free to read *text* as "essay" or "piece of writing." One should realize, however, that linguists study spoken as well as written texts.

²M.A.K. Halliday and Rusqaya Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (London: Longman, 1976), p. 1.

³Halliday and Hasan, p. 11.

⁴Nils Enkvist, "Coherence, Pseudo-Coherence, and Non-Coherence," in eds., Nils Enkvist and Viljo Kohonen, *Text Linguistics, Cognitive Learning, and Language Teaching* (Turku: Finnish Association for Applied Linguistics, 1978), pp. 110-113.

⁵Halliday and Hasan, pp. 6-10.

⁶Wallace Chafe, "Language and Consciousness," *Language*, 50, No. 1, 111-133.

⁷John Hinds, "Paragraph Structure and Pronominalization," *Papers in Linguistics*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 95; and "Organizational Patterns in Discourse," in ed., Talmy Givón, *Discourse and Syntax, Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 12, (New York: Academic Press, 1979), pp. 142-143 and 149-156.

⁸Charlotte Linde, "Focus of Attention and the Choice of Pronouns in Discourse," in ed., Talmy Givón, *Discourse and Syntax, Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 12 (New York: Academic Press, 1979), p. 352.

⁹The studies referred to are those of, respectively, Stephen A. Bernhardt at the University of Michigan (reported in "Distinctive Features of Cohesion," a paper read at the 1980 convention of TESOL); Peggy Anderson at the University of Iowa (paper entitled "Intersentential Cohesion of Texts as Written by Learners of English as a Second Language," read at 1980 TESOL Convention); and Waldemar Gutwinski, *Cohesion in Literary Texts* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974).

¹⁰Rita Jeruchimowicz Jeremy, "Use of Coordinate Sentences with the Conjunction *And* for Describing Temporal and Locative Relations Between Events," *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 2, No. 2, 146, 149.

¹¹Lynn Hagen, "An Analysis of Transitional Devices in Student Writing," *Research in the Teaching of English*, 5, No. 2, 190-201.

¹²Ilona Henderson, "The Use of Connectives by Fluent and Not-So-Fluent Readers," *Dissertation Abstracts*, 40 (1980), 5345 A (Columbia University Teachers College).

Lives Examined: A Course in Writing Autobiography

IN RECENT YEARS I have taught, four times now, a course in which students write autobiographical essays. I have come to feel that this course has unusual value. It confronts students with the difficulties of writing well, but also seems to encourage them to want to overcome these difficulties, and to capture in writing memories, reflections, and analyses that are important to them. The inventiveness of students' essays, and the often obvious determination to find a style appropriate to a chosen theme, suggest that many approach the task of writing more flexibly and responsibly than I believe they have done before. One unusual feature of the course is the appearance of guest speakers who talk about the development of their lives. Another is the course's broad appeal. It draws many students who are not English majors and many who would not regard themselves as writers or potential writers.

Autobiographical writing, both as a component of composition courses and as a focus for more advanced writing courses, has become increasingly popular in the past few years. A brochure mailed to my house last week from a nearby community college announces two sessions of a course on "Autobiography and Personal History Writing." Several recent textbooks and anthologies reflect this same trend, which the "Roots" phenomenon has doubtless strengthened.¹ One may also observe an interest in personal writing outside the university. My local

David Faris is Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature, University of Texas at Dallas.

Editor's Note

Although Faris describes a course designed for and taught at the college level, it would seem that a course in writing autobiography would be suitable for any grade. Unlike the "do your own thing" courses of the 60's, Faris's course is carefully designed around guest speakers, readings, and a great deal of serious writing.

library has recently embarked on a "family" project that will encourage participants to compile family histories. In writing a history and description of my own course, then, I hope principally to encourage still others to make use of autobiographical assignments in their writing courses, whether or not autobiography becomes the focus of the course.

One proviso: in approaching such assignments, both student and instructor must concern themselves primarily with producing effective writing. The personal focus of autobiography is what makes it possible for the student to aim at mastering his subject. That mastery is the student's goal, not therapy, or even increased personal awareness for its own sake. The instructor, for his part, must not allow the personal focus of autobiographical writing to deter him from demanding effective prose and from calling attention to whatever is unclear or misjudged.² Approached with this concern for successful writing, autobiography can, I believe, aid students to become more careful, more committed to accuracy and precision, in all the kinds of writing they do.

"Lives Examined" was first given at Harvard. Four years ago I brought the course to a second school, the newly opened Dallas branch of the University

of Texas. In the composition of its student body, UT-Dallas differs from Harvard in several important aspects. It has only junior and senior level undergraduates. It is an urban commuter university. The average age of students is around thirty. Nonetheless, the course has been a success at both schools.

It is important to note that the course did not originate as a writing course, but as a Social Sciences elective under Harvard's General Education program. The "lives" to be "examined," in the first formulation, were those of a series of guest speakers. These speakers were asked particularly to discuss their choice of a career and their professional lives. We expected to study—not drawing on books, but on the spoken accounts of living persons—some of the pressures involved in career choices and in practicing different careers.³ Readings reflected this vocational orientation, since we read autobiographies chosen to illustrate the speakers' various professions. Our original notion was to require students to write an autobiographical essay as one of the three required papers for the course; for the others there would be additional options.

The vocational emphasis of the course quickly disappeared. We found that the speakers were often inclined to discuss childhood, or their education, or present personal relationships—without referring extensively to their professional lives. Once that happened, the reading list seemed mostly irrelevant. We then found that our students, even when offered other options, wanted to write papers about

themselves. By the end of the term that first year our view of the course had changed. We began to pay less attention to assigned readings and more attention to students' writing—virtually all of it autobiographical. As much as anyone, these students established the present focus of the course. Their interest in autobiographical writing, and the success of that writing, pointed us in a new direction.

Our approach to the course the second year we offered it reflected the discoveries of the first year. We continued to invite guest speakers, but now viewed their role differently. The lecturers would act as foils; they would help students see the individual shape of their own lives. We made it clear that the course would emphasize the writing of autobiography, instead of making that a one-shot option. We increased the paper assignments from three to four. We reorganized the reading list with a view towards stimulating students' writing.

Some students feel, at least initially,

that their lives do not provide the stuff of autobiography. Hence nearly all the current readings attempt to provoke self-analysis. They present accounts of personal experience that can help students, by comparison and contrast, to define their own attitudes, to discover their uniqueness. A first group deals with family life—Kafka's *Letter to His Father*, Simone de Beauvoir's *A Very Easy Death*, some essays on "home" by Joan Didion, Delmore Schwartz's story "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities." A second group presents readings from some recent works in oral history (or "life study")—Ronald Blythe's *Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village* and Thomas J. Cottle's *A Family Album: Portrait of Intimacy and Kinship*. In these books students may see the dreams of "ordinary" lives. But they also see the artful editing of the accounts that Blythe and Cottle present. I have found these accounts useful in opening discussions on the analogous artfulness of autobio-

graphy.

I use James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* as a central book in the course. Students sometimes have trouble with Agee's dense descriptions, but the book introduces a crucial problem: the difficulty of capturing the truth of human experience in writing. Agee's method and focus—and the gorgeous oddity of his style—show one attempted solution. The final portion of the reading list presents a series of stories, essays, and books that offer other solutions, by illustrating still different focuses and styles for autobiography. Writers have included George Orwell, Hannah Tillich, Alfred Kazin, and Michel Leiris.

Initially the appearances of the guest speakers were the *raison d'être* for the course. But as I have mentioned, the presentations of the guest speakers now also seem primarily important as a means of getting students to reflect or to react—in their writing. It would be possible to offer the course without inviting guest speakers. Still, I think students do learn much about their



lives through comparison with the lives of others. And I think they may particularly benefit from hearing the experiences of persons who are not the subjects of published biographies or autobiographies. I should note that I have not found it difficult to line up rosters of guest speakers. Most agree to come because they are willing to share their experiences and simply hope to be helpful to others.

In choosing guest speakers I tend towards those who have made a mark for themselves in some career. This provides a focus for comparison and contrast with other speakers. Beyond that, I look for people who are inclined to introspection, and people whose lives have developed in an unusual manner. They may have switched careers late in life (an advertising executive now in the ministry, a psychiatrist now Dean of Students at a large university). They may have fought against limitations or hindrances (several women who insisted on a career). They may have altered their primary career in response to a strong secondary concern (a lawyer turned environmentalist). They may have suffered extreme hardships (being orphaned, imprisonment for political reasons, concentration camps). I send all speakers an identical invitation, urging them to concentrate their presentations on key influences and experiences in their personal development. The way they choose to present themselves, what they select as significant for discussion in the limited time available—these will point up differences among their present attitudes toward their experiences.

We devote some class time later to discussing the speakers' presentations. These discussions are not judgmental—indeed I have found students invariably tactful and appreciative both in meeting speakers and in reflecting on them. We attempt, rather, to clarify each speaker's attitudes towards his or her life, and to see resemblances or contrasts with other speakers in the course. One purpose is to see the variety of human lives and values—a cliché that takes on curious

force. Another is to develop a loosely analytical habit of mind that may aid students when they reflect on their own past experiences. The course, incidentally, makes a point of not viewing lives according to standard theories of personal development. We don't read Freud, or Erik Erikson's theories of the life cycle, or Lawrence Kohlberg on stages of moral growth. There is no template. I make this clear to the guest speakers.

The heart of the course is now the students' writing. I assign 30-35 pages of autobiography during a semester—three papers of 5-8 pages (or so; students often disregard the upper limits), and then a final project of around 10-15 pages. These limits do not allow for a full chronology of a life. Instead students focus their essays on particular formative experiences, recurrent problems, important relationships or influences. I emphasize the need to define topics carefully. Some students choose a theme that will run throughout the four essays, one that may allow them to incorporate parts of their earlier work into the final paper. Sometimes these final projects run fifty or more pages.

The papers I receive are my rebuttal to critics who wonder whether the course is not simply a forum for narcissistic maundering: "Do your students write as well?" Feeling in control of the subject matter (experiences and emotions of their own lives), students are able to see when they have failed to capture what they want to express, and also that they can alter the style of their prose to better convey the essential perception of a past experience. Many students comment on the difficulty of this writing, and on the extensive revision their papers undergo. Students have varied greatly in the amount of their previous experience with writing. All have had a semester or two of composition; for some, that is that. Others have been practiced writers of short fiction or poetry. I have found the less experienced writers quite able to hold their own.

The first assignment calls for a

straightforward account of a past experience. This experience should have been a significant one—should have prompted a change in values, or marked the effect of a strong personal influence, or perhaps inflicted limitations the writer even now struggles against. I urge students when they are choosing this first topic to consider whether it presents a problem or theme they might want to develop in later papers. If it does, fine—though students are free to focus separate papers on separate subjects. In the second and subsequent papers I am more inclined to suggest experiments in style, and urge students to look for topics by going beyond their personal memories and reflections.

Some students seem to have no trouble choosing a topic or series of topics. For the benefit of others, and as a way of encouraging new ideas, I hand out a list of some possible approaches to autobiography before each essay is due. I have recommended, for instance, that students analyze an environment—a room perhaps—in which they feel particularly comfortable, or which they have somehow made their own. I have suggested studying the autobiographical implications of recurrent daydreams or fantasies. I have suggested that students compare their memories of an incident with those of other participants, and then analyze the implications of the differences.

What is students' writing like? First of all, many papers impose themselves by the force and precision of their writing. Self-analysis is not easier or harder, I suppose, than other kinds of analytical thinking (perhaps this differs from student to student). But in any case it is a form of analysis, and the best papers show careful analytical thought. They juggle multiple facets of an experience; they show a sophisticated awareness of detail, even of symbolism; they are precise without being narrow. I think that writing about one's own experience may be a particularly helpful way to help students see what successful analysis involves. They can judge when they've

got close to the target. If there is a "right answer" here, only they know it. Frequently students tell me they have abandoned a given project; they simply couldn't get it right. Such an experience is by no means only a defeat.

Papers have treated many varied topics: falling in love in the Rockies, falling in love in Las Vegas, the dynamics of engrained procrastination, shooting an alligator, the history of a case of shyness, what it means to be a small child in a large and successful family, a difficult pregnancy, giving up basketball. These papers differ in tone and mood, but in all the writers have been able to make their work "speak" to a reader who is essentially a stranger to them. Most of these particular examples have been straightforward in announcing a topic, and straightforward in pursuing it. And so in many cases one might say they are written with artless art. Central to this "artless" prose is an awareness of the importance of detail. These papers mark the benefits of an insistent sharp focus.

I'll give only one example here—the opening paragraph of a paper discussing childhood rivalry between two sisters:

After giving birth to my brother Charles, my mother became so ill that the children were sent to stay with neighbors. But when it came to sending me away, Mother said, "Let Sandy stay. She makes me laugh." It was late 1960, I was one and a half, just learning to talk, and allowed to stay. It's doubtful that Mary Ellen, then three and now twenty-one, would remember this event or attach any importance to it. But if there is a seed for the resentment and dislike which existed between us, perhaps it was my preferential treatment at this time.

The writing is succinct and direct, and the topic is quickly established. It is, moreover, tied to a precise early experience that unquestionably happened, but has also taken on the characteristics of private myth. Mary

Ellen may not remember it; the writer has made it a touchstone.

The course also encourages variety and experimentation in writing. Students often come to talk to me about an upcoming paper. On several occasions they have announced a desire to try a new writing style—generally a freer, more poetic kind of prose than they are used to writing. Interestingly, this desire for stylistic experimentation seems to precede the choice of a subject. Writing itself has become the central interest; life history now serves the writing process, not vice-versa. These experiments with style are not always successful. The narrative line may become lost; autobiography in the mode of stream of consciousness may allow the reader no entry. I try to warn against these dangers. It seems nonetheless important for students to have realized that their own writing involves choices, that writing means aligning style and subject, that the medium is at least part of the message. The personal subject matter appears to free students—many of whom would never register for a creative writing course—to be "creative" in this way.

Here also, I suspect, the more experienced or imaginative students instruct the class. I often read papers aloud. Hearing the variety of approaches that others have taken may encourage—and justify—students who wish to try something new themselves. I also suggest one particular focus for autobiography that often seems to spark imaginative papers: I urge students to look at family memorabilia—old scrapbooks, photo albums, letters, home movies. Students who have done so—the reasons for this are something of a mystery to me—tend to use this material in striking ways. Somehow, moving beyond their personal memories of past events seems to encourage them to move beyond their habitual approaches to prose.

One such paper reviewed a young man's teenage years. It took the form of short descriptive analyses of a series of photographs depicting the boy's room at home. At first severe plainness,

befitting a new start in a new house. Then in the last moments of boyhood, acceptance of conventionality: a room "furnished by Mother, walls decorated by me: maps of the world for Knowledge, car and airplane posters for Masculinity, baseball posters for Social Identity, a reproduction of a famous artwork (gift from Grandma) for Culture, a Mexican flag for Experience." As he became a teenager the boy's world began to change—with fervent leaps, this was a sixties' adolescence—and so did his room. On the wall posters of pop stars gave way to Dostoevsky, gave way to Tolkien and hobbits and flower power, gave way to Marx and a red flag. Suddenly there were books everywhere, and these changed: Strindberg and Hesse, then Marcuse and Mao, then Camus and Kierkegaard. Finally the photographs became kaleidoscopic, as the room grew messier and messier with the unsortable, unclassifiable paraphernalia of an adolescent rich in change. A "junk-pile," he privately admitted, though "environmental collage" and "la condition humaine" were explanations offered to baffled parents. The disjointed quality of this paper suggested the sharpness of changing whims and allegiances. In a subsequent paper, covering some of the same ground, the writer acknowledged that there was one constant: rock music. And running through that paper, as through the life, was an ironic refrain: "And I knew the hit tunes." This second paper also made effective use of its chosen diction and style: short sentences, teenie slang, a frenetic and exclamatory prose. This prose gave a sense both of the then and the now, for the overwrought style suggested the writer's present distance from all the earlier selves he had subsumed and surpassed.

Many other papers similarly exploit techniques uncommon in ordinary expository prose. They may alter the chronology of events. They may treat different components of an experience in sharply separated sections of a paper, often combining these separations with shifts in point of view or

diction. They may combine present and past perceptions or reactions. It is remarkable that these more "artful" papers often treat volatile or disturbing topics: divorce—one's parents' or one's own, the experience of severe self-doubt or depression, deaths of family members, attempts at suicide—by the writer or someone close to the writer, sexual or marital problems. The very difficulty of doing justice to such topics perhaps accounts for the turn to "experimental" or "imaginative" styles—though these also measure the writer's enviable attainment of distance and perspective.

As I mentioned earlier, the course draws a surprising variety of students; they have come from virtually every undergraduate major. Part of the reason for this is administrative. "Lives Examined" was part of the General Education program at Harvard. Students at both universities must elect courses in these areas. But despite this inducement it is clear that a great many students simply welcome the chance to do autobiographical writing. The strongest of them, as it turns out, are by no means always experienced writers, or humanities majors. The cross-disciplinary appeal of the course suggests that autobiographical writing may be an excellent means of counteracting the cross-disciplinary decline in writing ability so frequently lamented in recent years.

I know that autobiographical writing can be false or dull. "What I Did Last Summer" is rarely what *anyone* did last summer. I myself had a student who wrote insistently like Erma Bombeck. But I think the teacher can generally forestall trivial writing—simply by demanding serious, successful work. In responding to the first set of student papers, I try to be encouraging, but am also highly critical. I emphasize to students that they are not writing a journal or diary, and must address their audience, one that does not know them. I give grades. Still, there are two types of students who may have trouble with the course. One is the student who temporarily finds self-scrutiny painful; the process of

undergoing a divorce may have this effect. The second is the student who lacks sufficient self-esteem (and perhaps sufficient trust in the teacher?) to take personal analysis seriously. Writing short biographical accounts of friends or family members might be an acceptable alternative in such cases, though I have had only one student who chose to try this.

In teaching the course I think my most important responsibility lies in writing individual comments on students' papers. It happens, from time to time, that I get a paper so "personal" I simply read it and return it. This is rare. In keeping with my opening proviso, I generally attempt to comment at length on the success or failure of each essay as a piece of autobiography. Writing autobiography works well only when the student sees the task as a challenge and an opportunity. Students may also feel that autobiography entails risk. A careful, engaged response reinforces the value of the student's project, and at the same time diminishes the student's sense of vulnerability. In my comments I try to make it clear that I care about what the student has to say. Since I care, I am concerned that he or she find the words, find the focus, find the format to get it said.

Many students in the course do seem to learn to write with greater power and concentration, and many accept the implicit invitation to experiment with new writing styles. I believe students also benefit from the course in more personal ways. Richard Lanham's recent "anti-textbook" is skeptical about prevailing conceptions of self, sincerity, and "a style of your own." Lanham argues that "identity" and a personal writing style are by nature flexible, and emerge only from broad experimentation.⁴ I suspect he's right. But my experience with "Lives Examined" surprisingly suggests that such experimentation is compatible with a focus on autobiography. Lanham writes: "The adolescent stylist should be encouraged to impersonate other people, not 'be himself'" (p.116). Perhaps everybody has been, and is,

many people. Certainly students in my course attempt widely different styles of writing, none of them Lanham's "neutral expository prose that filters out self" (p. 116). Writing autobiography allows the experimentation Lanham encourages, while also allowing the traditional benefits of self-reflection ("the unexamined life...").

It is difficult to measure the increased self-understanding students may gain from a course in writing autobiography, although I think the course pushes them to analyze aspects of their lives they have not considered before, and leads them towards greater satisfaction and self-confidence. They themselves say so. What have I got out of the course? A realization I would not have forecast: that telling the truth, that is, coming as close as one can, about any human experience, however slight its impact on the worlds of history and moment, makes for forceful and moving writing.

Notes

¹Such books include Charles Muscatine and Marlene Griffith, *First Person Singular* (New York: Knopf, 1973); David Dillon, *Writing: Experience and Expression* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1976); Robert Lyons, *Autobiography: A Reader for Writers* (New York: Oxford, 1977).

²On this last point cf. Richard C. Gebhardt and Barbara Genelle Smith, "'Liberation' Is Not 'License': The Case for Self-Awareness through Writing," CCC, 27 (1976), 21-25.

³The original idea for this course was Dr. Martin Peretz's, then Head Tutor of Harvard's Committee on Social Studies. Dr. Peretz sought to design a course in which students would learn primarily from the experiences of living persons, rather than from books. He was largely responsible for designing the original reading list, and organized the roster of guest speakers both years the course was given at Harvard. From the beginning, however, the day-by-day administration of the course was the task of myself and another assistant, Walter Harp. The second year Mr. Harp and I assumed pretty much full control of the course, and made the changes in conception and organization that are discussed in following paragraphs. I believe other teaching duties have kept Dr. Peretz and Mr. Harp from offering the course again at Harvard.

⁴Richard A. Lanham, *Style: An Anti-Textbook* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 115-119.